

Joseph Conrad Farm (Miller's Farm)
Pa. Rte. 183 and Bright School Road
Mount Pleasant vicinity
Penn Township
Berks County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-260

HABS,
PA,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. PA-260

JOSEPH CONRAD FARM

(Miller's Farm)

Location:

On north side of intersection of State Route 183 and Bright School Road (Township 489), about 150 feet east of Powder Mill Creek and Powder Mill Creek Road (Township 824), about 0.1 mile northeast of the Tulpehocken Creek and the bed of the now defunct Union Canal, Mount Pleasant vicinity, Penn Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Bernville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.407520.4474200 (house)
18.407575.4474220 (barn)

Present Owner:

United States Government

Present Use:

None; scheduled to be demolished in 1977 for the Blue Marsh Lake project.

Significance:

This is a unique example of the convergence of Pennsylvania German industry, commerce, and agriculture. Because the land on the farm is substandard for the area, there was a constant effort by the owners to break into commercial and industrial fields. On the site of this farmstead, for example, there has been (aside from a general farm and dairy farm) a grist mill, a powder mill, a clover mill, a steam-powered mill, an important canal warehouse, and a budding bungalow community. The surviving house, barn, and warehouse bear witness to the general prosperity of the owners: the house is a large, five-bay, late Georgian, stone structure and the barn is a traditional Pennsylvania German bank barn with a large addition. The canal warehouse is particularly significant because it is a rare survival of its type. The farmstead also has the typical array of Pennsylvania German outbuilding -buildings, all planned according to vernacular traditions.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The stone farmhouse is a late Georgian, five-bay structure probably built circa 1815. The barn probably dates from about 1850. Conrad's Warehouse was constructed in conjunction with the Union Canal and, therefore, dates from the 1830s. The now-demolished grist mill probably dated from the 1840s, while the powder mill's datestone read: "Joseph Conrad A.D. 1810." The various farm outbuildings were constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The six bungalows forming "Irwindale" were built about 1930.
2. Architect: None. A few of the smaller outbuildings were obviously planned and executed by the resident farmers, but the barn, farmhouse, warehouse, and mills were planned and executed under the direct supervision of a master builder, carpenter, or mason. The planning and building fabric of the farmstead and its attendant industrial structures is, therefore, in general accordance with the material folk culture traditions of the Pennsylvania German population of southeastern Pennsylvania. They are thus similar to other surviving examples in the area, and readily identifiable as to type, function, and appearance.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the farm is located. Chain of title information for Berks County before circa 1875 is vague and often incomplete, so this data is based on educated guesses using the best available information. Reference is to the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Berks County, except where noted.

1745 Deed dated November 27, 1745 recorded
in Philadelphia in Patent Book 12 page 340
Proprietors of the Province of Pennsylvania
(John Penn, Thomas Penn, and Richard Penn)
to
Stephen Brecht (Breght, Bryard, or Bright)

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- 1754 Deed dated April 20, 1754 recorded December 21, 1764
in Book 4 page 94
Stephen Brecht (by will to his son)
to
George Adam Brecht
David Brecht
Hans Wendel Brecht
- 1754 Deed dated April 20, 1754 recorded December 21, 1764
in Book 4 page 94
George Adam Brecht and Maria Catherine, his wife
to
Jacob Conrad
- 1796 Deed dated September 6, 1796 recorded January 28, 1797
in Book 15 page 408
Jacob Conrad and Maria Catherine, his wife
to
Joseph Conrad (their son)
- 1821 Deed dated July 17, 1821 recorded December 15, 1821
in Book 32 page 130
Joseph Conrad
to
Jacob Conrad

The original property was divided into two parcels at this point in order to give Joseph Conrad's sons, John and Jacob, each a separate establishment. For more information on the John Conrad House, see HABS No. PA-259. Ownership of the Joseph Conrad Farm passed to Jacob and then as follows:

- 1847 The property was again divided at this point into Tract #1, the probable site of the Joseph Conrad House and Barn, and Tract #2, the probable site of Conrad's Warehouse. The two tracts were reunited in 1895, and then descended as a single unit to the present.

Tract #1

- 1847 Deed dated April 1, 1847 recorded August 7, 1848
in Book 55 page 439
Estate of Jacob Conrad
to
John Riegel

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- 1859 Deed dated April 4, 1859 recorded April 5, 1859
in Book 68 page 228
Estate of John Riegel
to
Henry Witman, Joseph B. Conrad, and Michael Riegel
- 1860 Deed dated April 10, 1860 recorded April 18, 1860
in Book 70 page 81
1/3 share of Michael Riegel and Catherine, his wife
to
Joseph B. Conrad and Henry Witman
- 1881 Henry Witman died, leaving his 1/2 share to Rebecca
Sherk, his daughter; deed unrecorded.

Tract #2

- 1847 Deed dated April 1, 1847 recorded April 17, 1847
in Book 53 page 311
Estate of Jacob Conrad
to
Jacob Bright
- 1880 Deed dated April 12, 1880 recorded April 15, 1880
in Book 135 page 459
heirs of Jacob Bright
to
John M. Bright (his eldest son)
- 1880 Deed dated March 13, 1880; deed unrecorded
John M. Bright and Lydia, his wife
to
Joseph B. Conrad and Henry Witman
- 1881 Henry Whitman died, leaving his 1/2 share to Rebecca
Sherk, his daughter; deed unrecorded.
- 1895 Tract #1 and Tract #2 reunited
Deed March 29, 1895 recorded November 4, 1925
in Book 564 page 474
Joseph B. Conrad and Marie, his wife
Rebecca Sherk, widow of John Sherk and daughter of
Henry Witman
to
Henry M. Bright

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- 1915 Henry M. Bright died, leaving the property to Emma E. Bright, Charles H. Bright, Elizabeth E. Bright, Sallie I. Blatt, Adam S. Bright, E. Ida DeTurk, Thomas J. Bright, Anna A. Rossman, John C. Bright, Flora L. Bright, and Raymond M. Bright; deed unrecorded.
- 1921 Deed dated March 22, 1921 recorded March 22, 1921 in Book 507 page 622
Emma E. Bright, the widow, Charles H. Bright and Leona Bright, his wife, et. al., heirs of Henry M. Bright.
to
Alfred and Elenora Heck
- 1923 Deed dated March 22, 1923 recorded April 16, 1923 in Book 564 page 592
Alfred and Elenora Heck
to
Emma E. Bright, et. al. , heirs of Henry M. Bright
- 1925 Deed dated June 16, 1925 recorded November 6, 1925 in Book 624 page 363
Charles H. Bright, et. al., the heirs of Henry M. Bright
to
Irwin Fred Weber
- 1933 Deed dated March 24, 1933 recorded April 7, 1933 in Book 747 page 381
Irwin Fred Weber
to
Friedrich Wenzel, Carl Seib, Henry Severin, and Lucie Martha Clauss
- 1933 Deed Dated May 29, 1933 Recorded May 29, 1933 in Book 734 page 494
Share of Friedrich Wenzel
to
Carl Seib, Henry Severin and Lucie Martha Clauss
- 1948 Deed dated September 18, 1948 recorded September 20, 1948 in Book 1027 page 4
1/3 share of Carl Seib
to
Carl and Frieda Seib

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circa 1955 Carl Seib died, leaving his share of the property to Frieda Seib, deed unrecorded.

1972 Frieda Seib died, leaving her 1/3 share of the property to Dorothy E. Goroon, her daughter.

4. Alterations and additions : Two frame additions to the east end of the house were made circa 1900, and the interior of the house was altered several times. The barn had a large addition on the middle of the south side circa 1880. A concrete silo was built in the 1930s and the first-floor plan was adjusted to accommodate automatic milking equipment. Conrad's Warehouse was adapted to a number of different uses after the closing of the Union Canal in 1884. It held equipment of various types, was used for storage, and was briefly an illegal still in the early 1930s.

The grist mill (now demolished) was altered several times, adding steam power in the 1880s.

B Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

For information on the Brights and the Conrads, see the John Conrad House, HABS No. PA-259.

The powder mill, located in the meadow northeast of the house, made history in 1838 when a Joseph Long was killed there in an explosion. The mill was then converted into a clover mill which has long since been demolished. The mill near the farmhouse was converted to steam power in the 1880s when the water from Powder Mill Creek became too weak to drive the mill.

In 1925 the property was purchased by a Reading land developer named Irwin Fred Weber who began construction of a bungalow community along the Tulpelocken Creek just northeast of Conrad's Warehouse. Weber completed just six bungalows before the Depression struck, but a handsome sign painted on the east end of the barn welcomes vacationers arriving along the former path of State Route 83, and local residents still have fond memories of "Irvindale." Weber apparently planned to fill the field between the stone farmhouse and Conrad's Warehouse with bungalows, and actually constructed a concrete swimming pool in the bed of the Union Canal as part of the development scheme. Weber used Conrad's Warehouse as a construction headquarters, and probably intended to make it an administrative center for this typical 1920s land development.

C. Sources of Information

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Title Search, prepared by the Berks County Title Insurance Company of Reading, Pa.; in the possession of Beatrice Sheidy, Bernville, Pa.

Interviews with Beatrice Sheidy, Bernville, Pa., a local historian and long time resident of the adjoining John Conrad House; June, July, and August, 1976.

Interviews with Paul Speicher, Bernville, Pa., a long time resident of Penn Township; June, July, and August, 1976.

2. Secondary Sources:

Arthur, Eric, and Dudley Whitney. The Barn, A Vanishing Landmark in North America. Greenwich, Conn.: NY Graphic Society, 1972, esp. pp. 84-113.

Dornbusch, Charles H., and John K. Heyl. Pennsylvania German Barns. Allentown, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, Vol, 21, 1958.

Klees, Frederick, Pennsylvania Dutch. New York: MacMillan 1950.

Long, Amos, Jr. The Pennsylvania German Family Farm: A Regional Architectural and Folk Cultural Study of an American Agricultural Community. Breinigsville, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Society, Vol. VI, 1972.

Meiser, George, IX, "Historical Survey of Blue Marsh Project Area", Historical Review of Berks County XXXVI (Summer, 1971), 98-110: general survey with good map of the area.

Moser, Nick, "Penn Township", Reading Sunday Eagle Magazine (December 1, 1957), 1-3.

Prepared by Thomas Kheel
Project Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
Summer, 1976

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a good example of a well-planned ensemble of Pennsylvania German farm buildings. The stone farmhouse (das Bauerhaus) is a fine example of the provincial adaptation of late georgian architectural motifs. The five-bay facade is symmetrically organized around a formal central entrance, leading to a central hall and staircase. Stylistic details include simple quoining and keystone lintels. On one gable end, the cornice returns, while the other gable end has a pent roof, common in Pennsylvania German houses. Both the house and the barn are built into embankments, allowing multi-story entry and exposure; this was traditional in Pennsylvania German planning.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor to fair (salvage rights have been exercised by the last private owners).

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The L-shaped house measures 58'-6" across the five-bay front by 31'-1" deep. The house is two-and-a-half stories tall on a partially exposed basement. On the east end of the front section is a one-and-a-half-story attached wooden shed measuring 12' -1" by 18' -2". In the L is another wooden addition, one story in height, measuring 7'-7" by 13' -4".
2. Foundations: The foundations are constructed of randomly laid rough limestone masonry with some large blocks of reddish sandstone (possibly salvaged from the Union Canal locks) mixed in under the addition on the far east end wall. The corners are crudely quoined.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: The outside walls are constructed primarily of small, gray limestones randomly laid with simple quoins of larger stones. The east addition has vertical plank walls, while the northeast addition is covered in with clapboard. Both are painted white.

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4. Structural system: The outside walls are limestone masonry about two feet thick. The floors are held up by heavy timber framing bearing on the outside walls. Some interior partitions and the two wood additions are simple stud framing of recent origin. There is no ridge pole in the roof structure; lapped and pegged joints provide the central roof connection instead.
5. Porches: There is a front porch, measuring about 19' long by 5'-3" deep, protecting the front door and the adjoining window to the east. The porch is constructed of wood painted white, and is composed of four bays across the front (including one entrance bay) and is one bay deep. The seven wood columns forming the bays are chamfered with square bases and capitals. The balustrading is formed of solid paneling set between the posts. The porch is reached by a wooden stairway with four risers.
6. Chimneys: There is a brick chimney beginning at the attic floor which runs just inside the west end wall, piercing the roof on center. There are holes in the floor and the brickwork to accept pipes from iron heating stoves formerly used on the lower floors. Another brick chimney rises from the basement and pierces the roof on center just inside the east end wall. This was used to vent the coal furnace in the cellar. There are at present no fireplaces in the house. The shed addition of the far east end wall has a brick chimney (stuccoed above the roof) venting a forge below.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main front door has been removed so all that remains is a wood screen door of recent manufacture. The door surround is a shouldered architrave trim. The rear door on the first floor is a wood paneled door with six lights. The cellar is entered through a set of wood paneled double doors on the west end wall. The shed on the east end wall is entered through a batten door, while the addition in the northeast corner is entered through a twelve-light wood door.

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- b. Windows: Most of the windows have six-over-one lights in double hung wood sashes. The window on the first floor just east of the door has shouldered architrave trim like the door. The rest of the windows have wood lintels with a prominent carved keystone. The east end wall has no fenestration while the east wall of the L has a six-light window. There are two six-light windows in the west end gable. The windows in the wood additions have six-over-one-light double hung sash and a three-light single sash.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: The main block of the house has a gable roof, which because of the L-shape of the block is cut off abruptly on the east end of the north facade. The roof is covered with tin laid with standing seams placed over split wood shingles. The roof on the northeast corner addition is flat and covered with tin. The shed roof of the east end addition is covered with slate.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The wide, molded wood cornice extends around the west gable end as a pent roof. On the east gable ends, the cornice returns.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first-floor plan reflects the symmetry of the facade. The main door leads directly into a large central hall with the stairway to the second floor at the rear. To the west are two equal-sized rooms. To the east is another large room (now the kitchen) with a stairway to the cellar in the east end wall. The wood addition in the northeast corner is entered from the kitchen and contains a washroom and a bathroom. The bathroom, however, can only be entered at the back of the central hall. The shed addition on the far end wall was a workshop or smokehouse, and is equipped with a built-in forge. It can be entered only from the outside.

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- b. Second floor: The stairway rising from the first floor leads directly to a small landing. Only two of the four bedrooms on the second floor can be reached directly from this landing. The bedrooms in the two front corners of the second floor can only be reached by circulating through the back two bedrooms.
 - c. Cellar: The cellar is reached from a stairway under the main stairway, and from a narrow stairway in the end wall of the kitchen. The cellar plan is divided into three rooms: one large room directly under the double parlor and the central hall, a second smaller room under the kitchen, and a third small space below the addition to the near east end wall which was used for the coal bin.
- 2. Stairways: The stairway in the central hall is essentially one continuous unit connecting the cellar to the attic. It has a straight run from the basement to the first floor, a turn with one landing connecting the first and second floors, and another turn and landing connecting the second and attic floors. A simple straight run stairway connects the first floor and the cellar in the east end wall of the kitchen. The stringers on the main stairway have a scroll-work pattern applied.
 - 3. Flooring: All the flooring in the first and second floors is pine boards of various widths. The floors in several rooms have been covered with linoleum. The attic floor is made of rough, tongue and groove planks, about 10" wide. The addition on the near east end wall has a wood floor covered with linoleum. The shed addition has a concrete floor. The cellar has a dirt floor with some concrete sections.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls in all the rooms on the first and second floors are plastered. The walls are painted various pastel colors or covered with decorator wallpaper. There are chair rails throughout, except for the kitchen which has wainscoting.
 - 5. Doorways and doors: All the doorways as well as the windows, are surrounded by heavy molding with shouldered architraves. The doors are wood-paneled. Most of the surrounds are painted white.

6. Mechanical Equipment:

- a. Lighting: Most of the rooms are fitted with early versions of modern electrical fixtures, usually mounted in the ceiling in the center of each room.
- b. Heating: There are at present no fireplaces in the main block of the house. A coal furnace supplied central heat through cast-iron radiators until recently.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is oriented to the south, squarely facing old State Route 83 (formerly the main road between Reading and Bernville). The house is built into a steep embankment, allowing for multi-story entry and exposure. The now-demolished mill stood at the intersection of old State Route 83 and Powder Mill Creek Road (about 50' west of the farmhouse). The barn and the other major outbuildings are built into the embankment rising behind the house. Entry to the farmstead is from a narrow private driveway coming off old State Route 83 at a slight angle. The farmstead is sited about 1,500 feet northeast of the Tulpehocken Creek and the bed of the now defunct Union Canal.
2. Landscape design: The farm exhibits the typical Pennsylvania German sensitivity to the rolling contour of the land, with the buildings placed on the landscape in convenient and visually satisfying ways that take full advantage of the complexities of the site. The house, barn, and springhouse, for example, are built directly into embankments allowing for multi-story entry and exposure. The pedestrian approach to the house, moreover, has been carefully planned with a stone stairway leading to a 46' X 19' terrace directly below the porch entry. This terrace is held in place by stone retaining walls, and provides a shaded, semi-private leisure space. The entire farmstead has been well planted with trees, flowers, and shrubs.

3. Outbuildings:

- a. Barn: This medium-sized (67'-2" x 56'-2") bank barn is a typical example of Pennsylvania German barn planning and construction. The barn is oriented to the south which serves to protect the space below the projecting forebay (also known as the vorbau, vorschuss, overhang, overshoot, or overshot) from the prevailing northerly winds in the colder months. The forebay also provides shelter for the five doors leading into the first floor of the barn. The barn has been extended by a cross gable addition on the south which provides for straw and hay storage above and milk house and work space below. The open forebay has been continued under the addition. The original part of the barn is four structural bays wide, while the addition is two structural bays wide.

The plan of the two main floors of the barn is typical of the Pennsylvania German bank barn. The first floor is essentially one continuous room that has been carefully subdivided into four sets of stalls serviced by two feed alleys. The second and fourth doors (counting in from the west end wall) are service doors leading to feed alleys where the animal feed and bedding is transferred from the second floor through "hay holes" to troughs running along each end of the adjoining stalls. The animals enter their stalls through the first, third and fifth doors. This is an interesting survival of the traditional first floor plan. Most Pennsylvania German dairymen have substituted one or two rows of easily serviced metal stanchions running the length of the barn for the multiple entry system. The front wall of the first floor can thus still be entered through any of the five, two piece, "Dutch" doors. The front wall of the first floor is constructed of wood, while the side walls are randomly laid limestone masonry with professionally cut reddish sandstone blocks (probably salvaged from the Union Canal locks about 1900) used as quoins. The interior of the first floor has been heavily whitewashed and has a concrete floor.

The plan of the second floor of the barn is also typical of the Pennsylvania German bank barn. The two central bays, as entered by two sets of large doors on the uphill side, were originally used as a threshing floor and have walls built part way up between the bays to contain the grain being processed. The bays to the right and the left were storage mows for staw and hay. The first and second floors are joined by two "hay holes" through which hay and staw were dropped for use on the first floor. There is fully two-and-a-half stories of open storage space above the level of the second floor for piles of hay and staw. There are three built-in ladders dowelled into the columns of the trusses to allow for access to the hay lofts. A five-bin granary can be found in the southwest corner of the second floor.

The barn is painted white, though the earlier coats of red have bled through. There is a two-over-two-light window in the gable of each end wall, and three sets of ten-light, factory sash windows in the basement end walls. The addition has a series of six-over-six, double hung sash windows on the first floor. A large, professionally painted sign advertising "Irvindale" graces the entire east end wall. The barn superstructure is constructed of massive timbers (some sawn and some hand-hewn) with mortise and tenon joints. Knee braces and angle braces perpendicular to the slope of the rafters support the roof. A steel track arrangement runs the full length of the inside of the peak of the roof to provide for movement of hay and staw with a hay hook.

The roof is clad with tin sheathing placed directly over tongue and groove boards. A single, sheet metal ventilator can be found on the western half of the barn roof. An elaborate wood piping system connects this ventilator to the first floor. The roof is structurally continuous over the forebay. A concrete block silo is located just outside the northwest corner of the barn. It is loaded from the top and serviced from the first floor.

- b. Springhouse: A stone springhouse measuring 16' x 11' is built into an embankment directly behind the house.

It contains a spring and undoubtedly was used also as a root cellar. It is a masonry arched structure (though a shed roof has been built on top), and is entered through a wood panel door.

- c. Pig Barn: A small, one-and-a-half-story pig barn measuring about 30' x 12' stands between the house and the bank barn. It is simple wood frame construction roofed with mineral surface asphalt paper. A single sheet metal ventilator similar in design to the bank barn ventilator can found on the roof. The exterior is painted white. The windows are four-over-four, double hung sash with small, pedimented wood frames.
- d. Corncrib: A freed-standing corn crib measuring about 6' x 12' can be found between the springhouse and the bank barn. It is simple stud construction and severely weatherbeaten.
- e. Privy: The privy is just south of the pig barn and is constructed of simple nailed stud framing. It has a shed roof covered with corrugated tin.

Prepared by Thomas Kheel
Project Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
August, 1976

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Tulpehocken Creek Survey was undertaken in 1976 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) in cooperation with the Philadelphia office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction of Blue Marsh Lake. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, the documentation was prepared on site by project supervisor Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania); student architects Robert E. Clarke (University of Notre Dame), Gregory Lee Miller (University of Illinois), Robert Moje (University of Virginia), Daniel F. Clancy (University of Pennsylvania), and Steven M. Shapiro (University of Maryland); HABS project historian Thomas H. Kheel (Cornell University) and HAER project historian Stuart Campbell (University of Delaware). The drawings were completed in the HABS office in 1977 and 1978 by Mr. Clarke and HABS architects Susan M. Dornbusch and Bethanie C. Grashof. The HABS data was edited for transmittal in 1980 by Alison K. Hoagland of the HABS staff.